



## Labor leaders protest increases in AZV premiums

On Thursday morning, December 15, the leaders of various labor organizations met in the SIMAR building in Dakota to discuss the announcement by the Government to increased premiums paid by both employers and employees for the island's health care program as implemented by the AZV. Since the first year of its inception, the National Health Care program under the AZV has been a hot political topic, and Labor Leaders feel that the new increases are not the solution for the deficient that AZV is now carrying. The implementation of these new increases not only demand a larger contribution on the part of the employer, but an increased percentage withheld from salaries, and an additional surtax of 5 Aruban florins will be added to each doctor visit and 2 Aruban florins to each line of prescription.

Rudy Geerman, President of SEPA along with leaders of IOWUA, SINBA, SIWA, ABV and OPPA are asking the public to join them in a peaceful demonstration of protest on Tuesday afternoon, December 20 in front of the Parliament in Oranjestad at 4:00 p.m. Rudy Geerman declared adamantly on Thursday "This is not political in any way, it affects all members of the community, and we welcome everyone to join us in presenting our objections to this action."

Various organizational leaders take issue with the increases, as they consider it a temporary "Band-Aid" that will not solve the problems for which the AZV cannot balance their costs. "They are telling us we have to pay this, but they are not telling us WHY we have to pay this," cited Clifford Heyliger, Vice-President of SIWA, the worker's union from WEB, "They are demanding of us without giving us participation. Our question is 'What are they doing to FIX the problem?'"

It would appear that a number of the organizations, including the Chamber of Commerce, which is a quasi-governmental agency, have presented alternative methods to the government that would help relieve the lack of funds. Some of these recommendations include a more conscientious collection of back premiums owed by a number of large companies, and internal policing of administrative costs. "We are not seeing that they want to *change* anything," elaborates Mr. Heyliger, "and get to the root the problem, this is just an easy quick fix, they are telling us themselves that this will not be enough, and that in two or three years they will be back asking for more. This is easy, but this is the problem, we are seeing that the government does not want to take the responsibility for alleviating the *causes* of an increasing deficit, and so this is not the solution."

Paul van Niel of OPPA, the union for retired civil service workers is also protesting on the part of all retirees, individuals that are living on a fixed income, and have the greatest need of the AZV. The additional cost added on to doctor visits and subscriptions may very well be disastrous to elderly peoples' tight budgets. "We also have issues with the premiums required from retirees," he admits.

Labor leaders hope that with a show of support for their protest by the public, the government will acknowledge their recommendations and be willing to sit down and work out a solution that is fair to everyone. They urge all the islanders to join them in protest in front of the government buildings on L.G. Smith Boulevard across from the harbor on Tuesday afternoon.